DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 562 UD 028 327

TITLE	Black Churches: Can They Strengthen the Black Family?
INSTITUTION	Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	88
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Carnegie Corporation of New York, 437 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022 (free).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	Carnegie Quarterly; v33 n1 Fall/Win 1987-1988
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Black Community; *Black Family; Church Programs; *Church Role; Counseling Services; Economic Development; *Family Problems; Parent Education; Parenting Skills; *Program Implementation; Religious Cultural Groups; Social Development; Tutorial Programs; *Urban Problems; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	California (Oakland); Carnegie Corporation of New York; Georgia (Atlanta); Indiana (Indianapolis)

ABSTRACT

Project SPIRIT, a Carnegie Corporation sponsored program of the Congress on National Black Churches, has worked within the black community, particularly black churches, to try to strengthen black families. Black churches have played a critically important role in sustaining the black family since the days of slavery. The black church in the 1980s, while continuing to respond to spiritual needs, has been paying more attention to economic and social development within black communities. Project SPIRIT contains the following components: (1) after school tutorial programs for 6 to 12 year olds, which lasts 36 weeks and is aimed at strengthening skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic; (2) a 6-hour a week parents' program adapted for black parents from Systematic Training for Effective Parenting; and (3) a pastoral counseling program enabling participating ministers to become more helpful in dealing with a range of family problems. Project sites include Oakland (California), Indianapolis (Indiana), and Atlanta (Georgia). Limited evaluation of Project SPIRIT suggests the beginnings of positive effects on self-image and school performance. The report contains the following items: (1) a discussion of the research base for Project SPIRIT; and (2) a list of Carnegie Corporation grants on behalf of black families in 1985-88. (JB)

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Carnegie Quarterly

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK VOLUME XXXIII NUMBER 1 FALL/WINTER 1987-1988

ED 337562

Black Churches: Can They Strengthen the Black Family?

Black organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League have become increasingly alarmed at growing evidence of the fragmentation of American black families. Negative outcomes for many black youths as a result of poor academic performance, too early sexual activity and pregnancy, substance abuse, and homicide are especially troubling. Many black organizations, therefore, have begun addressing these problems in conferences and other forums and offering supportive services to black families in their communities. Now the black church, historically the spiritual anchor for black people, is intensifying its role as a major resource for dealing with the social and economic problems of the black poor.

Can black churches join with parents and the nation's inner-city grade schools to improve the self-esteem and academic performance of black students in danger of becoming the next generation of dropouts and delinquents? Can black churches, parents, and schools, working together, foster both the intellectual and emotional growth of these children, so they will not be defeated by the extremes of poverty and deprivation as they enter school and later a complex, technologically oriented society?

Encouraging answers are coming from one program of the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC). Called Project SPIRIT, it was launched in 1986 with a grant from Carnegie Corporation as part of its support of church-based programs on behalf of children and families and

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of black-run institutions that specifically address black family needs.* Project SPIRIT, which stands for the qualities of strength, perseverance, imagination, responsibility, integrity, and talent that CNBC's program tries to instill in schoolchildren and parents, is currently being pilot-tested in five black churches in each of three urban sites with large populations of poor blacks: Oakland, Indianapolis, and Atlanta.

Evidence from the first year of operation suggests that Project SPIRIT's after-school program may have hit upon a winning combination of academic tutoring, morale-building, and instruction in practical living skills that is making a substantial difference in children's school careers and relationship with their parents. Parents enrolled in a complementary "parent education" program also benefit, learning about child development and how to provide their youngsters with the emotional support and discipline that can help them try again instead of giving up and make them feel "like somebody" instead of worthless.

As implied in its goals, Project SPIRIT generally enrolls underachievers — pupils who are bored with traditional school settings, who have low grades and often have discipline problems. About 65 percent of the referrals come from schools that have all but given up on their charges, although many concerned parents, having heard of the program through their churches or by word of mouth, enroll their children themselves and participate in the parent education component.

The gains that many of the 350 children are making in Project SPIRIT's pilot efforts are impressive:

- A first-grader, once slated to repeat her grade because of behavior problems, improves so much after five months in Project SPIRIT that her grades switch from "failing" to "passing." Her teacher and parents are pleased that the once unruly student is at last receiving the help she needs.

- Another first-grader repeatedly copies the work of fellow students. Disappointed over the child's lack of self-confidence and limited academic progress, her public school teacher requests a parent conference to seek solutions. The student enrolls in Project SPIRIT. Three months later, her teacher notes, "There has been improvement in this child's work. The tutoring really helped."

- A second-grader with a record of academic and behavior problems, who is enrolled in Project SPIRIT, becomes more self-controlled, reads better, and makes the honor roll.

- A little girl who flunks arithmetic in November, enrolls in Project SPIRIT and, by January, according to her teachers, improves so markedly in all of her subjects that she is also named to the honor roll.

- One single parent who enrolls her sons ages eleven, nine, and seven in Project SPIRIT becomes so inspired by their improvement in reading and math that she enters in a local community college en route to an eventual business degree.

* See page 9 for grant listings.

The Black Church in Historical Perspective

Project SPIRIT was organized in the belief that "the black church is one of the few institutions owned and operated by blacks within the black community that can effectively assist large numbers of black adults in enhancing their capacities as parents," according to Vanella A. Crawford, director of CNBC's program and a child and adolescent psychotherapist. "The black church also provides the cultural context that is desperately needed to enrich, support, and guide the education and growth of black youth."

Since the days of slavery, black churches have played a critically important role in sustaining the black family. From the time the first black church was founded in 1773, they have served as both spiritual haven and extended family, providing a beleaguered people with vital material and human resources for survival. In addition to offering pastoral counseling, the churches have raised funds within their congregations to help friends and neighbors in need; they have taught reading and writing, established black colleges, burial societies, and other institutions in the black community, provided soup kitchens, nutritional education, housing, day care, and health care for the sick and elderly, among other services.

Indeed, notes Robert Hill, former research director of the National Urban League, "The black church was a welfare agency for blacks long before HEW [federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] was invented."

In the early decades of the 20th century, black churches became more secularized and began to lose what sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called "their other-worldly outlook."* They became more interested in the affairs of the community and contributed to the work of the NAACP and the National Urban League. As mass migrations brought blacks from the South to northern cities, the percentage of blacks living in urban areas rose from 10 in 1910 to 48 in 1950 to 60 by 1970, and black churches served as important way stations. The churches found they had to respond to more transient populations and more families under stress. During the civil rights movement, much of the organization and training in the tactics of nonviolence was carried out in the black churches.

The black church in the 1980s, while continuing to respond to spiritual needs, has been paying more attention to economic and social development within black communities. In a survey of 100 black churches,** the majority were found to offer services to one or more of the following groups: the elderly, children, teenagers, the handicapped, substance abusers, runaways, ex-offenders, the families of the terminally ill.

The decision by an increasing number of such churches to battle the more disastrous effects of social and economic isolation and disarray on urban black families has not come without much soul-searching and internal debate by the clergy. According to former CNBC executive director, Joseph P. Eaglin,

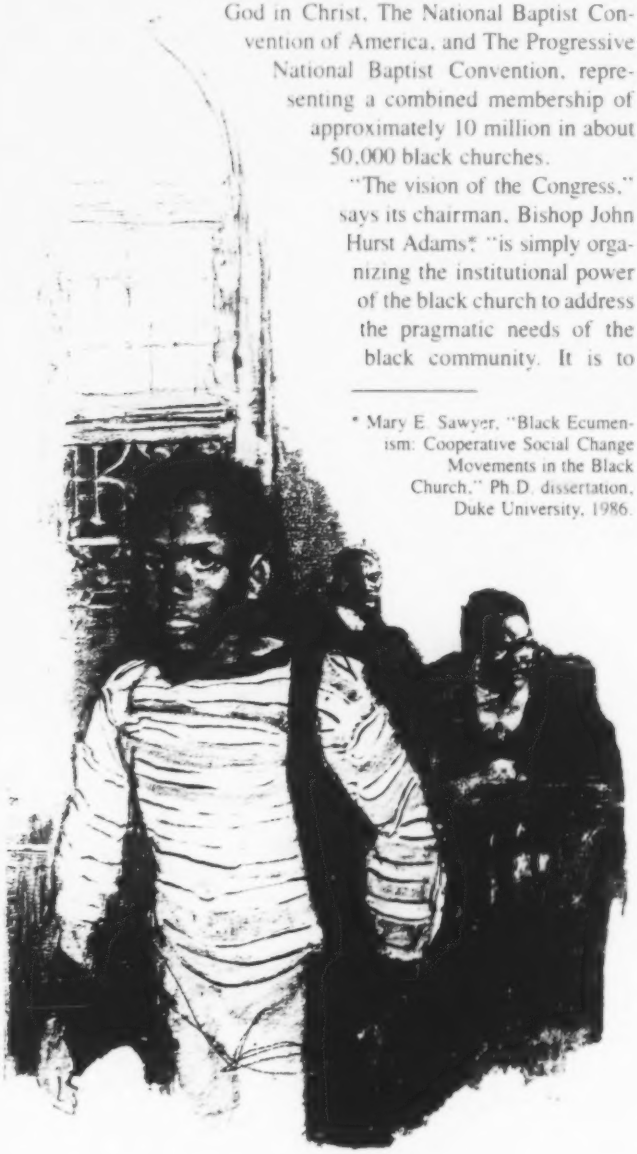
* *The Negro Church in America*, by E. Franklin Frazier (Schocken Books Inc.), 1964, p. 51.

** *Dollars and Cents* magazine, June-July issue, 1981.

Jr., "In many cases the churches have not worked out their theological position with respect to such sensitive issues as teenage pregnancy and the role of women in the church." Church-sponsored preventive programs for children and adolescents are of fairly recent development and are not yet widespread, if only because many inner-city churches have lost a high proportion of their middle- and working-class membership to the inner rings of suburbia and must seek outside financial support to carry out their social service missions.

To build on and strengthen the black church's ministry, the Congress of National Black Churches was founded in Washington, D.C., in 1978 through the auspices of the Lilly Endowment. Its purpose is to serve as an umbrella organization of five major black American religious denominations: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The Church of God in Christ, The National Baptist Convention of America, and The Progressive National Baptist Convention, representing a combined membership of approximately 10 million in about 50,000 black churches.

"The vision of the Congress," says its chairman, Bishop John Hurst Adams,* "is simply organizing the institutional power of the black church to address the pragmatic needs of the black community. It is to use power to relieve pain; to use power to enhance possibilities. . . ."*



* Mary E. Sawyer, "Black Ecumenism: Cooperative Social Change Movements in the Black Church," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986.

The Lilly Endowment supported the Congress during its early years; but it has since attracted major project funding from Aetna Life Insurance Company and the Ford and other foundations as well as the Corporation.

Project SPIRIT in Action

On June 5, 1984, the Corporation convened a meeting of black clergy and representatives of lay church organizations to discuss ways of promoting greater church participation in programs for children and families.* Out of that meeting came several proposals that took root, one of which became Project SPIRIT. The project was shaped under the guidance of curriculum specialist and former Head Start director and evaluator, the late Geraldine Wilson, and black experts in the humanities, education, and the social sciences. Together with Congress officials and clergy, they approached a number of black ministers to ask their cooperation in setting up after-school and parent programs in their churches and also rallied local grade school administrators and teachers behind the idea.

As it has developed, Project SPIRIT has three components, the first two of which are supported by the Corporation and the third by Lilly: 1) the after-school tutorial program for six-to-twelve-year olds, which is 36 weeks in duration and aimed at strengthening children's skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic and also at building their self-worth, 2) a six-hour a week parents' program adapted for black parents by Vanella Crawford from STEP, or Systematic Training for Effective Parenting,** and 3) a pastoral counseling program enabling participating ministers to become more helpful in dealing with a range of family problems, from communication between parents and their children to human sexuality and pregnancy.

While the after-school programs of the 15 churches, selected to participate by clergy on site, vary slightly according to local requirements, they all share a core design that is implemented under the direction of a minister or a layperson coordinating in each city. For three hours after every school day, children grouped by age level concentrate mainly on their homework supervised by retired or active public teachers and other professionals, who are recruited into the program and trained in providing "motivation and ego support," says Vanella Crawford. Pupils then undergo supplementary tutoring from workbooks and curricular materials adapted by Crawford and the local teachers to enhance children's basic skills.

A portion of the afternoon is devoted to the development of black cultural and ethnic pride and improved self-concepts as well as practical living skills through games, skits, songs, and role-playing real-life experiences. Encouraging children to explore their blackness and self-identity indeed lies at the heart

* "The Role of the Black Church in Addressing the Problems of Children and Youth," a Carnegie Meeting Paper, 1984.

** STEP was developed by Donald Dirkmeyer, Ph.D., and Gary D. McKay, Ph.D., psychologists formerly based at the University of Minnesota.

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of Project SPIRIT. The program's principal evaluator, Dr. Harriet Pipes MacAdoo, a Howard University authority on the black family, believes that if black children are knowledgeable and comfortable within their own ethnic group, "they will be able to develop their potential and aspire to greater achievement.

"Western societies," she points out, "have consistently ranked light skin more favorably than dark, an evaluation often internalized by minorities, which Project SPIRIT attempts to overcome."

If the after-school tutorial and parent programs (and the pastoral counseling) prove successful over time, CNBC's ambitious board and staff members hope to replicate Project SPIRIT in black churches across the nation through a new National Resource and Training Center based at the Congress's Washington headquarters. Project director Crawford says the Center will disseminate materials to churches wanting to start their own programs, work in tandem with other Congress programs such as its anti-drug campaign targeted for 25 cities, which are potential Project SPIRIT sites, and provide technical assistance and training to churches needing help in securing financing for their programs.

The Oakland Spirit

"Healthy child development is the centerpiece of my ministry," says the Rev. George Murray, site coordinator of Oakland's Project SPIRIT and assistant to the Bishop of the Church of God in Christ. Tall, affable, a model of formal gentility, Rev. Murray shuttles back and forth among the five churches operating the program, monitoring the progress of the 125 students and reassuring anxious parents about the social, emotional, and educational strides their children are making.

On any day after school, the children typically walk to their assigned church classrooms. The numbers at each church range from 12 to 30 across all elementary school grades. Forming a circle to greet each other, they sing the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Evr'y Voice and Sing,"* then repeat and discuss with their teachers the meaning of Biblical and secular proverbs that contain common-sense guidelines for everyday living: "It is better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish"; "You can't get blood out of a turnip"; "The bird in hand is worth two in the bush."

After snacks of sandwiches, potato chips, and fruit punch, the children, now grouped by grade level, are ready for highly personalized attention from their teachers, who may be as many as three to a room. The students do their regular homework assignments, which the adults closely check, making certain the pupils understand the directions, helping them to decide on and obtain materials for their projects. All of the teachers make themselves available for questions and assistance appropriate to each child's strengths and weaknesses. "Generally," comments one teacher, "both teachers and children are as excited about the tutorial process as they are about the results, and all share an infectious enthusiasm, a sense of commonality and community."

"At the very least," remarks Rev. Murray, "the children are in a sheltered environment and are far better off than they would be at home unsupervised or playing in Oakland's drug-laced streets."

The students then turn to their brightly colored workbooks crammed with further lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Here teachers provide practical help in overcoming specific academic problems, such as "math anxiety" and errors in spelling and grammar, and bolstering children's confidence and motivation to improve overall scholastic performance. "We believe," says one teacher, "that the children's success in academic work helps enhance their sense of worth, and that makes them try harder." The teachers are careful to make all the children feel equally esteemed and yet recognized for their uniqueness. They write comments on the workbooks from "very good" to "I'm not sure you were interested in doing this today."

One teacher stresses the merits of good enunciation, coaxing children out of their "lip-laziness," as she puts it, and encouraging them to speak louder to be heard or softer so as not to disturb others. In one classroom students rehearse the script of an imaginary radio play called "The Haunted House," where they are required to improvise their own sound effects and discuss how hand gestures, raised eyebrows, and other body language heighten the meaning of spoken words.

Pupils are asked to keep a daily journal to sharpen their writing skills. One ten-year-old proudly tells of her poetry writing; another girl wants her journal read aloud.

"Is there anything private in there?" asks her teacher.

"No," she replies. "My private stuff goes in my diary."

The Oakland model is attracting widespread attention in the area and has generated requests from other churches to participate or have it duplicated at their own expense. One Oakland school has installed a similar late-afternoon program.

Rev. Murray welcomes parental collaboration, but this has been hampered thus far by low enrollment by Oakland's parents in the parent education component. Teacher Anna Vann, whose own daughter and son-in-law are in Project SPIRIT's parent program, is constantly phoning the parents and holding meetings with them in her home to convince them to join or continue the training.

Not surprisingly, the children referred to Project SPIRIT by the schools or other sources often come from troubled homes and neighborhoods that undermine their self-worth and their ability to concentrate on studies. As a result they frequently "act out" in school and with peers and do poor academic work —behaviors that regular public school teachers may inadvertently negatively reinforce by punishing or ignoring the "dis-

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* Words by James Weldon Johnson; music by Jay Rosamond Johnson; published in 1910. First verse:

Lift evr'y voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty,
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

ruptive elements" in the classroom. Project SPIRIT tries to compensate for some of these deficits by various means.

Rev. Murray recalls the stepmother of two girls in the program, ages nine and ten, tearfully complaining that "they are practically unmanageable." They are reacting, she explains, to their mother, who is cocaine-addicted and has attempted suicide after trying to drown one of the children in the bathtub. The girls are also upset by their father's recent operation for a brain tumor. Rev. Murray schedules pastoral counseling and consultation with a psychologist for the girls.

A drug-dependent mother sends her seven- and nine-year-old sons to live with their grandmother. Immediately the grandmother enrolls them in Project SPIRIT because the eldest has developed a speech impediment. Separated from her husband, the mother finally kicks the drug habit and joins Oakland's parent education program where she receives encouragement from staff members and other parents and begins improving her life.

Dealing with the Problems in Indianapolis

Ronald Swann, a doctoral candidate in geography at Indiana University and site coordinator of Project SPIRIT in Indianapolis (he also heads a chimney-sweeping business), and his wife Estelle, who teaches in the program and in the Indianapolis school system, have similar observations about their students. Having become immune early on to surprises, the Swanns tried to find out why one little girl did not arrive for an after-school session: "Sister's not coming today because she had to go home and wash her clothes," came the explanation from the child's sister.

"Why didn't she do it over the weekend?"

"She couldn't go home."

"Why couldn't she go home?"

"Mommy sent us over to our stepfather, so her boyfriend could be there."

In the first year of the project, says Estelle Swann, "we were disappointed by the lack of discipline and by the disdain for adult authority in so many of the kids. We believed communication with them would be difficult at best."

"Sometimes," Mr. Swann adds, "the children's hair was not combed, or their body odors suggested infrequent bathing. We gave them soap and sometimes we had to wash them."

Estelle Swann recalls that many of her student enrollees, the majority of them from single-parent households, "had never met a black professional. They had never visited a church. They had never recited the Lord's Prayer or said grace before meals." Her husband comments, "Our first couple of days, we thought, 'If it's going to be like this, Lord help us.' They couldn't handle a simple question like 'What's your name?' They'd look down and say nothing. You had to try and make them speak up and generally help with their self-esteem."

The Swanns went to work on discipline and self-control. First, Ms. Swann made the children understand that they could not run and play in church. Then she separated them by age to keep the older students from teaching the younger ones "negative habits" that the Swanns were seeking to correct.

"The girls fell in line," Mr. Swann continues, "but the boys—it was like talking to a brick wall. We threatened to expel a few, called the parents, and asked two children to leave because they wouldn't come for anything but snacks and were ready to leave as soon as they ate. We told the parents, 'We can't do anything with him. We're sending him home to you.'"

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For more than a month, Estelle Swann felt she needed to allot extra time for tutoring because the children's scholastic deficiencies were so severe. To monitor their progress, the Swanns arranged with the schools to see the children's grade school report cards.

"When we first saw the cards," Mr. Swann recalls, "you could have put us in a hole and buried us, we felt so bad. Their teachers had written 'disruptive behavior,' 'will not listen,' 'cannot complete the work.' First graders couldn't read. Second graders couldn't recognize eight words, not even eight. Fifth graders weren't sure about multiplication tables. And older kids were pressuring some of the kids to join gangs."

A staff member observes, "The kids don't get enough love, attention, and caring. They really relish your putting your arm around them. They seemingly have been deprived of that."

As one incentive, the Swanns promised the children Christmas presents if they improved their grades.

"The thing that really inspires me about Project SPIRIT," says the Rev. Urias Beverly, who runs the pastoral counseling component in Indianapolis, "is that it gives us something to work with. We don't have to sit around and wait and hope. We can be doing something every day that will make a difference. Maybe we won't see a lot of difference in our lifetime, but our children will, and their children will."

Progress in Atlanta

The Rev. McClellon Cox, site coordinator in Atlanta's Project SPIRIT, a doctoral candidate in theology at Emory University, and assistant pastor at 140-year-old Big Bethel AME Church, was "called" to the Methodist ministry after a career as a high school teacher and assistant principal (in Baltimore County, Maryland) and then college English teacher.

Cox is gentle but firm with his pupils and, like Rev. Murray and the Swanns, conscientious in bringing along these children of low- to moderate-income blue-collar workers who are "just barely making ends meet." He acknowledges that "work with this handful of mostly disadvantaged kids is, at best, a modest attack on a massive national problem. I know from my earlier teaching that I cannot reach all of my students, but must work diligently to engage as many as I can."

A sixth-grader fidgets in the center of the greeting circle of peers at the church. The youngster announces, "My name is Walter Black, son of Mildred and Darnel Black." Like the others who preceded him, he recites a short Langston Hughes poem:

I play it cool and dig all jive,
That's the reason I stay alive.
My motto, as I live and learn,
Is to dig and be dug in return.

Walter finishes his greeting with a proverb: "Sweep around your corner before you sweep around mine." He passes a multicolored broomstick-like icon to another member of the welcoming circle.

Cox recalls another sixth-grader in Project SPIRIT who was verbally articulate but could not read. "He would play it off," the minister says, "by disrupting the class. When we found out that he couldn't read, he dropped out of the program. His mother, who read at about fifth-grade level, wanted him to return, but she couldn't force him. Both parents know the importance of reading, but they are more survival-oriented. They figure that if their son graduates from high school and gets a job and doesn't get jailed like some of his brothers, then that's fine."

Cox adds, "I believe that I can teach. If the children and teachers see me doing something that they like, maybe they will do it also. That's part of my method of working with them. It takes a lot of energy, but I believe you have to expend that energy if you want Project SPIRIT to work."

The series of killings of black children in Atlanta several years ago has hurt many nonschool programs. Some school

principals refused to refer children to Project SPIRIT until Cox agreed to have them escorted home after leaving the churches. The minister sometimes wakes up at night, worrying that he may not attract enough youngsters to the program. "I have to return to the grade schools periodically," he says, "to talk to teachers and principals. Sometimes I have to talk to the church deacons so that they can assist in making the project work."

Project SPIRIT's teachers are enthusiastic about the program. Ms. Elise Gilham is replicating the parent training component

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elsewhere in the Atlanta community. Another teacher, Ms. Peggy Martin, already involved for several years in a training program for adolescents, hurries to Project SPIRIT after her regular working day. Ms. Earlie Smith, a retired Atlanta school teacher, is committed to the program despite the ever-present pressures of caring for her aging, ailing mother.

Some Project SPIRIT Results

While evaluation of Project SPIRIT thus far is limited, Harriet McAdoo's questions during January 1986 concerning enrollees' attitudes about their ethnic heritage and blackness as well as their educational aspirations suggest the beginnings of positive effects. The results match the observations of students by both their teachers in the public schools and in the program.

Given a choice of labeling themselves "Afro-American," "Black," "Negro," "Colored," or "White," half the children declared themselves to be black and 19 percent Negro. One question asked, What people do most Americans think are best? "Blacks," said 54 percent of the children; "Whites," said 28 percent. And which family member has the nicest skin color? "Their mothers," said 31 percent. However, in answer to a question about skin preference, 89 percent of the children said that the family member they preferred had the lighter color.

Questions concerning the children's educational preferences were also revealing. Fully half of Project SPIRIT's children aspired and expected to graduate from college. More than half wanted to be either executives or managers. The children's responses to questions about the amount of schooling they would need to obtain these high positions were realistic. What remains to be seen is the extent to which Project SPIRIT students will be able to meet those aspirations.

"There is still much that needs to be ascertained," concedes Vanella Crawford, "concerning the variables of race, education, family life, and self-esteem to determine whether or not these children will be able to realize their life goals and aspirations."

Pretests of the children entering the second year of Project SPIRIT have been conducted, but the data have not yet been evaluated. A posttest will be given in June of 1988, and the results of both will be available the following fall. McAdoo also plans to study parents' perceptions, educational and occupational characteristics, stress levels, values, and hopes for their children. Academic progress will be monitored more systematically through examination of the pupils' report cards provided by parents at the start and end of the school year.

Meanwhile, Barbara B. Richardson, a child development specialist asked by the Corporation to make a site visit to Oakland's Project SPIRIT, reports: "Overall it is to be highly commended for its program, field staff, site coordinators, and successes to date. Everyone in the program seems committed to the education of black kids. Their concern reminds me of when I attended segregrated schools in Virginia and my teachers didn't tolerate any slacking. They drummed into you that you had to be ten times better than whites. They believed in us, a factor which I don't think exists in today's public schools."

Wary of making definitive statements about Oakland's after-school program until scholastic achievement records have been examined, Richardson made several recommendations to strengthen Project SPIRIT's capacity not only for information-gathering and documentation but for student and parent recruitment and liaison with the schools in order to provide a better basis for assessing the project and its impact upon the families it serves.

Richardson concludes that the STEP program for parents offers valuable educational materials, a view with which participating parents agree. Says Richardson, "A mother who still attends, although her child is no longer in the program, explained that both she and her husband are teachers, but their only child — a boy — presented real discipline problems that they could not handle. After they began attending the STEP program they gradually learned to be consistent with him, instead of spanking him. 'It's been an ongoing struggle,' said the parent, 'but now he is much better . . . he is an only child and didn't know how to share or compete. The STEP lessons on discipline and communication were most useful to us.' "

Richardson commends the "cultural integrity and acknowledgement of socioeconomic realities of blacks" in CNBC's adaptation of STEP, but cautions that the curriculum may still contain an unspoken assumption that "problems experienced by the person and/or group reside within the individual or group." She urges more attention to the "systematic oppression that places black families at risk."

If many black youngsters are indeed substantially shaped by the disadvantaged milieu in which they grow up, Project SPIRIT's response cannot alone be expected to make the difference for large numbers of poor black children. But pastors like the Rev. Edward Reynolds, assistant pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, one of the five participating in the program, insists that Project SPIRIT, working at the lowest rung of the academic ladder, is sorely needed in black communities across America if youngsters are to achieve their potential *in spite of* the forces arrayed against them.

"When I was growing up," explains Rev. Reynolds, "I knew of three basic institutions — the family, the church, and the schools. Our schools are going through a lot of different changes. There are more single-parent families and latchkey children than ever before. The only institution that can offer real stability, I am afraid, is the church. It is our responsibility to see to it that our families and that our children survive."

He continues: "Project SPIRIT helps us in that area because I know we are stroking kids who normally might not even get touched. Their parents leave early in the morning and it's the kids' responsibility to get themselves up and off to school. Because these kids have been with us, they've had a stroking, some teaching, some values, and some understanding in the few hours that we work with them." ■

For information:
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A Research Base for Project SPIRIT

Scholarly research on the black family structure throughout the nation is indispensable for a clearer understanding of enterprises such as Project SPIRIT.

In 1987, the Corporation funded the Washington-based Joint Center for Political Studies for three years of research on "The Changing Black Family: Children at Risk." Milton D. Morris, the Center's director of research, and his deputy, Margaret C. Sims, explain that the research will:

- examine the last 25 years of trends in family structure, poverty, and welfare dependency among blacks;
- document and analyze the impact that these changes are having on black children;
- examine social, political, and economic variables associated with these changes in 47 metropolitan areas across the country; and
- explore the range and character of public and private programs created to respond to the "black family crisis" in several selected cities.

Morris and Simms envision a comprehensive data center on the black family that will provide public and private analysts and policymakers, particularly black elected officials, with information that will help them rethink and reshape social policies, which thus far have not resulted in full civil rights for the nation's disadvantaged minority groups or decreased their disproportionately high unemployment.

The obstacles that blacks face as a group in achieving social and economic parity with whites, reports the Center, increase the financial burden of public support to the children of the growing number of poor single-parent families, who depend on government assistance for food, shelter, and health care. They increase the chances that children from such households will themselves become adults dependent on government assistance.

Genesis of the Crisis

The problems that have served to stifle disadvantaged black children are the focus of recent Corporation-funded research by University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson.* He points to certain mega-trends, which have devastated the black community and which cannot be attributed either to racism, welfare state do-goodism, or a lack of get-up-and-go in the victims. Wilson contends, for example, that no research supports the widespread assumption that disadvantaged blacks lack a work ethic.

On the contrary, the sociologist argues that substantial numbers of blacks are unemployed because traditional avenues in the industrial sector, open to blacks before the mid-1960s, are now closed. Profound changes in the economy—primarily the shift from the goods-producing manufacturing sector to service-producing industries—has had a devastating effect on employment opportunities for blacks. Minority workers have been particularly vulnerable because of their concentration in industries that have suffered economic cutbacks, plant closings, and the relocation of firms to cheaper labor sites and to the suburbs.

In short, Wilson suggests that these forces have seriously hurt many poor blacks. Their sometimes deviant behavior results, he argues, from a sense of social resignation. Their low aspirations are a response to their perceptions of limited opportunity, an adaptation to the grim realities that they face.

Furthermore, an exodus of higher-income blacks from the inner city has hurt those disadvantaged blacks left behind, according to Wilson. "In previous years, lower-, working-, and middle-class and professional black families all resided more or less in the same neighborhood. Not so today. The exodus of higher-income families has removed an important social buffer that could have cushioned the effect, or deflected the impact of, the sharp increase in joblessness, that we've seen in recent years."

The removal of the more affluent families has created a vacuum in the inner city, leaving no one there to sustain the churches, schools, recreational facilities, and stores and to provide mainstream role models that help keep alive the perception that getting an education is worthwhile. Many inner-city children therefore are less likely to interact with employed people or with families that have steady breadwinners. Consequently, joblessness, as a way of life, takes on a different social meaning, and the relationship between schooling and post-school employment is blurred.

Given this social matrix, many poor black children are adversely affected in the development of cognitive, linguistic, and other educational and job-related skills necessary for work in the mainstream economy. Their teachers become frustrated over their performance levels and cannot give them the special attention they need. Hence, far too many children do not learn. They receive lower grades and lower aptitude test scores than do their economically better-off counterparts, and they are more likely to display disruptive behavior in school.

In his research on how schools fail black children, social scientist Harry Morgan, in his article, "How Schools Fail Black Children," notes that the youngsters enter the first grade with the same enthusiasm and positive feelings as nonblack students.* However, by the fifth grade their liveliness and interest are gone and replaced by passivity and apathy. In primary grades, points out the researcher, blacks progress at the same rate as do their white counterparts, until they experience what he calls the "third-grade syndrome." After the third grade, their achievement rates begin a downward spiral that tends to continue throughout their academic careers.

Nationally, 25 percent of black high school students drop

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* *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, by W. J. Wilson (University of Chicago Press), 1987.

* Published in *Social Policy Magazine*, Jan./Feb., 1980.

out before graduating; in urban areas, however, the dropout rate for black students may be as high as 50 to 75 percent, according to Stephanie Robinson, education director of the National Urban League. College participation rates for blacks peaked in the mid-1970s and have declined since then. Blacks, who make up 13 percent of college-age youth, are 9.5 percent of all undergraduates and 4.8 percent of graduate students. Only about 900 doctorates are awarded to blacks annually; 2.6 percent of the employed engineers in the nation are black.* ■

Carnegie Corporation Grants on Behalf of Black Families, 1985–88

Church-based Grants

Chicago Theological Seminary: for a field project on black church programs for children and families, $331,500 (3 yrs., 1985).

Congress of National Black Churches: for planning church based educational programs for children and youth, $24,300 (4 mos., 1985); for planning church-based educational programs for children and youth (renewal), $115,500 (8 mos., 1985); toward church-based educational programs for children and youth (renewal), $668,000 (18 mos., 1986); toward church-based educational programs for children and youth (renewal), $758,900 (18 mos., 1987).

Related Grants

Joint Center for Political Studies: for planning policy research on the black family $24,800 (2 mos., 1986); toward support for planning policy research on the black family (renewal), $500,000 (3 yrs., 1987).

Meharry Medical College: toward support of a community-based pregnancy prevention program for adolescents, $750,000 (3 yrs., 1986).

National Urban League: for a media campaign and program development to foster responsible sexual behavior among adolescent black males, $339,400 (2 yrs., 1986); for a media campaign and program development to foster responsible sexual behavior among adolescent black males (renewal), $414,800 (2 yrs., 1988).

National Black Child Development Institute: toward support (renewal), $225,000 (3 yrs., 1985).

University of Chicago: toward research on factors influencing family structure in the inner city, $300,000 (3 yrs., 1986). ■

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* All but National Urban League figures are cited in the report, *Focus on Minorities: Trends in Higher Education Participation and Success*, by James R. Mingle, a joint publication of the Education Commission of the States and the State Higher Education Executive Officers, July 1987.